

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 326.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. I almost said Wednesday. No, this podcast drops on Tuesday. Okay, happy end of March. I can't believe I was just recording the beginning of March, and here we are at the end of March. I really hope you enjoyed last week's interview episode with Daman. He's amazing. I love this conversation on anti-racism schools. The conversation was so fruitful. I hope you found it helpful.

This is a work in progress. The way that I see this conversation is that it's ongoing. There is no end destination. It has to be a mindset. It has to be a practice. It has to be a commitment where we have a vision for a school where all voices are heard, and we practice that on the daily. We have to recommit and align to that awareness. We have to create the awareness and align to that awareness and create that momentum where all kids are heard, all staff members are heard. There is equity at the staff level in addition to at the student level and school community level. So I'm so grateful to have had Daman on the podcast.

All right. We're going to switch gears now. we're going to talk about what is hard. I coach school leaders all day long. I hear how hard this job is. Hey, I've done this job for years. I'm with you. It is hard. I thought about why it's hard. I listened to my principals talk to me about what kinds of hard they are facing. I realized something I broke hard down into three different kinds of hard. We're going to talk about those three kinds of hard today.

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

So when I was thinking about what hard is I noticed that the human brain loves to think that anything you want to experience or accomplish, like a goal, a desire that you have, a mission you want to accomplish, a vision you want to have come into existence.

Anything that you want to experience or accomplish, the brain always starts with the belief that it's going to be so hard. It's going to require a lot of effort. The brain's like oh, why do you want this? It's going to take time. It's going to take energy. It's going to take effort. It's going to be so hard, right?

Somehow we got hooked into the belief that the things that we want but we don't yet have them, we desire them, but we haven't achieved them yet or we haven't experienced them yet. They somehow must be too hard for us, or they require way more effort than we think we can give.

So I want to talk about and ask you to contemplate what your definition of hard is. What is hard for you? What is effort? I want to offer that we can make school leadership feel less hard. Why? Because hard almost always comes down to our thoughts about school leadership. So here are the three kinds of hard.

Number one, physically hard. There are physically challenging tasks that require physical strength and endurance. If you are a runner, which I used to be in my younger days, my more youthful days, when my knees weren't barking at me. Running can be an endurance activity. It can take physical strength, it does take physical strength and endurance. You need to build muscle, and you need to have cardiovascular. It requires you to sustain that physical energy for a period of time.

So physically hard tasks are things that push our bodies at the physical level. While most of us are, not to my knowledge, powerlifting at school, there are physically challenging things that you do. There are heavy boxes you lift, and you might have to like learn how to appropriately physically

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

help a child stay safe, right? There are physically challenging tasks. I can remember having to run after kids who might be heading towards the street or heading out of the gate or not paying attention when we're on a walking field trip, right?

There might be some physical challenges that you face in school leadership. You might have to clean out your desk or clean out the resource room and the work room. I get it. There are things you do that are physically tiring.

Guess what? Because you're on your feet for 10/12/14/16 hours a day sometimes, yes, it is physically fatiguing to be a school leader because of the hours you work and the energy required at a physical level to complete this job.

But I will also say that's not usually what most people identify as the hardest part of their job. They might be tired from a long day or being on their feet or having cleaned out the library or some work room that's been dumped on for 10 years, and they have to tidy it up. Yes, those are physically fatiguing. But that's not what I hear when it comes to hard for most principals.

The second kind of hard is mentally hard tasks. the way that I see this happening in school leadership is that these are tasks that require mental strength and endurance. We feel mental strain when we are learning something new, when we are trying to solve a problem, when we're questioning how to approach something, when we're wondering how to make a decision.

Mentally hard tasks require our brains to concentrate and dig in and think deeply. The brain doesn't like it. It's like I would like things to be as easy as possible, as pleasurable as possible, and as pain free and effort free as possible. Thank you very much. That is my request.

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

But humans also love to be mentally challenged, to have a problem that they solve with their minds. We like to learn new things. We want to learn. We want to grow. That is literally why we're on the planet. We evolve ourselves. When we're infants, we learn how to babble. Then we learn how to talk, we learn how to walk, we learn how to interact and engage socially, we learn how to feed ourselves. Eventually, we learn how to use the restroom by ourselves.

We are an evolving species. We're born with the intention and the DNA to evolve. That doesn't stop when we're an adult. We think it does, but we actually crave contributing and solving things with our brains. So when your brain is offering you that this is too hard or I can't solve or I don't want to put the effort and energy that is required for this mentally challenging task, you can say to it but we actually do want this. We do want the result. Yeah?

Okay. So I promise you this. This area is one of the things I coach school leaders on, mentally challenging tasks, right? Having to learn how to be a principal. So my brand new principals come in, and they're like this is so hard. It's mentally taxing because it's something they've never done before. There is a huge learning curve. They're drinking by water hose, right? You're getting blasted. It's coming at you from all angles, and it feels mentally hard. It's hard to wrap your head around and to calm your brain and to prioritize. You don't know what to prioritize, and you feel like you're spinning and trying to solve all the problems at one time.

There is an abundance of mentally challenging moments in school leadership because there's always going to be a new problem to solve and something new for you to learn. Even if you've been in this job for 10 years, 20 years. There's always an opportunity for new learning. That is what feels like it's mentally hard. Like my brain has to work to solve this problem. Okay?

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

Then there's the third kind of hard. This is what I hear the most of, we might say it's physically hard or mentally hard, but we're really referring to this type of hard. That is emotionally hard tasks. Emotionally hard tasks are tasks that require emotional strength and endurance. So there's physical strength and endurance, mental strength and endurance, and there's emotional strength and endurance.

Emotional hard looks like this. Having to have an uncomfortable conversation. It's not physically hard to sit down with another person at a table and have words come out of your mouth and have words come out of their mouth, and your ears listen and their ears listen. That's a task you know how to do. It doesn't require endurance and strength for you to sit there.

It might feel mentally hard as you're trying to seek to understand them or gain connection or relatability, but what's really hard about that conversation is the discomfort emotionally that comes with the conversation.

Other forms of emotionally hard tasks as a school leader include witnessing someone struggling. This happens so much more than we realize, which is why we are physically tired because we witness someone struggling and that communicates to our humaneness. When we see another human struggling, we cannot help but want to help them. We want to help them not struggle. We want to get them out of harm's way, out of pain, out of any kind of suffering.

When we witness somebody struggling, whether they're struggling physically or mentally or emotionally, our innate response is to come in and help them, to swoop in and save them. If you can fix it, you want to help them. It can feel emotionally challenging for us, as school leaders, when we're watching somebody struggle with something we cannot solve for them.

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

You see it with your teachers. You see their struggle, and you want to solve it for them, but you can't. You cannot rescue them from emotional suffering. I know you want to, and I want to. I want to help you from emotional suffering. I want to rescue you, but I know I can't. But what I can do is offer this podcast to give you insights for ways for you to rescue you from your emotional suffering.

But witnessing somebody struggling, whether it's a student, a parent, a child of your own, a child you love, an adult you love, anybody. Any human on the planet that you see struggling, you're going to want to help them. When you can't, there is emotional discomfort that we experience in the witnessing of suffering, okay.

When we have to make certain decisions, there is a mental grind that comes with decisions where you need to collect the information you need in order to make that decision. But what feels hard about decision is the emotional discomfort that comes with hard decisions. When there is pros and cons to both, when it isn't clear, when there are complications, when it's a complex layered issue where you're having to make a decision where it's not squeaky clean but you've got to go with what's the best given the situation. That can feel highly emotionally uncomfortable.

Decisions can be hard to make. Not because your brain doesn't know how to make decisions or that it's physically taxing to make a decision. It's that it's emotionally taxing to make a decision. It's the feelings that come with that decision, right.

Another way is when you're being asked to do something as a school leader that you do not agree with. That makes school leadership feel really hard. I coach a lot of clients on feeling misaligned with the district's requests of them.

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

So, for example, I'll use myself as an example. I'm pretty sure I've used this before, but the district decided they were going to crack down on attendance. They wrote a letter at the district office. Somebody at the district office wrote a letter, but they put every principal's name at the bottom for that school. So if I had a student with chronic tardiness or absenteeism, I'm not really sure what the criteria was. But after so many absences, a letter would get sent out immediately, directly from the district to the parents. My name was on it as though I wrote the letter.

The letter was very harshly written. It's not the way I would speak to a parent at all. It was presumptuous, and it was very forceful and very top down. It was just not the way that I handled my leadership style at all. So it felt very out of alignment for me, but I was asked to do it like you're a member of this team. You're a member of this district. This is how we do business here. I felt so misaligned with that.

I had to then talk parents off the ledge and have them be mad at me, and I had to be emotionally mature and resilient. I had to hold space for parents being really upset that my name was on that letter and allow them to believe I wrote that letter and to also calm them down and tell them yes, that letter was sent out as a district letter. My name is on the letter and what can we do to reconnect here? Right?

Finding that balance of like honoring my employeeism as an employee and connecting with that parent from the style that did align with who I was as a leader. Okay. So that kind of hard, that emotional hard, is primarily what we mean when we say the words this is really hard. Most of the time. We're like, this is so hard. It's emotionally hard. Okay.

What I want you to consider is I want you to know what kind of hard it is that you're dealing with in the moment. What kind of hard are you experiencing as a school leader is a great first step. You need to identify is this emotionally difficult, mentally difficult, or am I physically fatigued? Am I



## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

physically wiped out? That's a great first step in understanding how you're going to overcome the hard that you're dealing with. Because when you identify what type of hard you're going through, it helps you to understand why you feel the way you feel. Okay?

Now, how do you make it less hard? That's a little tricky, but that's where coaching comes into play. That's my wheelhouse. It's my jam. I help you identify which kind of hard you're dealing with, and then I give you the tools to help it be less hard, less emotionally hard, less mentally hard, and even less physically hard.

Look, I just coached a client today, I asked her how are you feeling? That's how I start my calls. Like take a couple deep breaths, get centered. How are you feeling today? What's coming up for you? She said, I'm so tired. I coached her on honoring her body's need for rest. She actually took the rest of the day off because what she needed more than anything in the world in that moment was rest.

So in EPC, we talk through the hard. We coach on it. We pinpoint what type of hard you're dealing with, and where the work is difficult, and how to figure it out together, right? We're going to process those emotions because emotions are always the hardest thing we face. They're always the obstacle that we have to overcome.

So we're going to decide to make life less hard and feel less hard by acknowledging what kind of hard we're facing. That's the first step. You're like oh, this is emotionally hard for me. Okay, I get that. Now, what's the next step? Or oh, this is a mental grind for me. I need to take a break, give my brain some downtime. You see that happen. Like we have GoNoodle and we have all these brain breaks in class. Why? Kids' brains need a break just like our brains need a break.

## Ep #326: Three Kinds of Hard

So for those of you who are interested in learning how to make this job a little less hard, definitely schedule a consult with me. You can look at one on one coaching or you can look at joining EPC. They're both available to you. Depends on which way you prefer to be coached. But EPC, I'm telling you it's where it's at. These brilliant minds are in there cofacilitating this conversation, masterminding together, supporting one another, cheering each other on. It's brilliant.

So come on in to EPC. I can't wait to have you there. If you prefer one on one, we can do that too. All right, my friends. I want you to have an amazing week, and we will talk to you all next week. Take great care. Bye.

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